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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

August 8, 2006

NJMC Releases First Comprehensive Eco-tourism Guide for Meadowlands and Hackensack River

LYNDHURST, N.J. – The New Jersey Meadowlands Commission today released the first comprehensive guide to encourage eco-tourists of all ages to explore the Hackensack River Watershed area of Bergen and Hudson counties.

“This guide is a wonderful map to hidden natural wonders waiting to be discovered in the Hackensack River Watershed area,” said NJMC Chair Susan Bass Levin, also the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs Commissioner. “It marks another milestone in the transformation of the Meadowlands from a zone of ugliness and pollution into an eco-tourism destination. This area is no longer a place to avoid, but the place to be if you want to watch wildlife in Northern New Jersey and the New York Metropolitan Area. We hope this guide will encourage newcomers to visit the Meadowlands and uncover new places of interest to those who already know the glory of our ecosystem and support its restoration.”

“Birding and Wildlife Trails: Meadowlands and More,” is a 72-page, full color guide funded by the NJMC. New Jersey Audubon Society served as the project manager, and the Meadowlands Regional Chamber of Commerce and Hackensack Riverkeeper collaborated on the project with the NJMC. The guide is free and available in English and Spanish.

The Meadowlands guide features site descriptions, seasonal viewing forecasts, driving directions, public transportation options, and tips and guidelines for catch-and-release fishing in the lower Hackensack River. Featured sites include a number of NJMC properties, including the Kingsland Overlook Trail, Lyndhurst Nature Preserve, Marsh Discovery Trail, Transco Trail and Saw Mill Trail at Richard W. DeKorte Park in Lyndhurst. Other NJMC sites include the Kearny Marsh, Laurel Hill County Park, Sawmill Creek Wildlife Management Area, Mill Creek Point Park and Mill Creek Marsh in Secaucus, and Skeetkill Marsh in Ridgefield.

A wider range of sites throughout the watershed includes the Closter Nature Center, Demarest Nature Center, Emerson Woods, Flat Rock Brook Nature Center, Hackensack River County Park, Hackensack River Greenway through Teaneck, Overpeck Preserve, Palisades Interstate Park State Line Lookout, Liberty State Park, Ridgefield Nature Center, Van Saun County Park, Teaneck Creek Conservancy, Pascack Brook County Park and Wood Dale County Park.

The sites are organized into three distinct driving routes, each charted for a primary audience. The “Meet Me at the Meadowlands Trail” focuses on the Meadowlands, an urban wilderness where mankind and nature have learned to coexist and flourish. The “Family Trail” includes staffed nature centers and a stop at the zoo. The “Independent Naturalist Trail” is geared towards the individual, offering more opportunities for hiking and exercise.

The guide also includes a collection of locations that are either undergoing renovations or have limited public access. Among these are River Barge Park and Marina and the 587-acre Richard P. Kane Natural Area, which will become major attractions for eco-tourism in the next few years after the NJMC completes projects including trails, a promenade and educational areas. The guide will explain which areas are appropriate for a “Stop and Scan,” and which are appropriate for a more in-depth look.

“On behalf of New Jersey Audubon Society, I would like to thank the Commission for recognizing the unique opportunity presented by the New Jersey Birding and Wildlife Trails program, and for sponsoring the partnership that resulted in the creation of the ‘Meadowlands and More’ guide,” said Tom Gilmore, president of the New Jersey Audubon Society. “Trails programs such as ours are becoming more popular across the country; yet they focus primarily on bringing birdwatchers and naturalists to rural, undeveloped locales. We believe this effort, because it highlights urban oases within one of the most densely populated regions of the United States, is unprecedented, as is the potential for positive quality-of-life and economic impact based on the Birding and Wildlife Trails program.”

“This guide, like our pontoon boat cruises, guided canoe tours and Meadowlands Environment Center in Lyndhurst, is a valuable resource to encourage people vacationing and sightseeing in and around the New York metropolitan area to spend time and frankly tourism dollars in the Meadowlands,” said NJMC Executive Director Robert Ceberio. “The Meadowlands boasts a beautiful urban ecosystem used by a remarkable variety of birds, fish and other animals as a breeding ground and nesting area. Whether from a trail or canoe, there is always something new and surprising to see. This book will guide tourists to these places and give tips on how to get the most from their trips without disturbing the habitat.”

The NJMC will distribute “Birding and Wildlife Trails: Meadowlands and More,” to local municipalities, local libraries and tourism information centers. Copies also will be available at the NJMC’s Meadowlands Environment Center. To obtain a copy of this free guide, call toll free 1-888-NJM-BIRD. There is no shipping and handling fee. Any reporter wishing to receive a guide should e-mail their mailing address to nancy.benecki@njmeadowlands.gov.

“Ensuring the public’s ability to access the natural and recreational assets of the Hackensack River region is an important aspect of our mission and this comprehensive field guide will multiply the options available so that everyone can experience the abundant opportunities that exist right here in northeast New Jersey,” said Hackensack Riverkeeper Capt. Bill Sheehan.

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